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ABSTRACT

Using cognitive dissonance theory as a model in the experimental design, the author investigates the effects on student attitudes of Black ethnic culture materials included in speech classes. One hundred eighty students in all-white speech classes from four Illinois high schools were placed in three categories--prejudiced, moderate, and favorable-on the basis of pretest attitude assessment. Subjects were randomly assigned from the three categories to four experimental groups and a control group. Treatment folders containing the same Black culture materials but with different instructions were distributed to the four experimental groups--(1) Exposure (reading of materials), (2) Forced Compliance (writing a pro-black persuasive speech), (3) Forced Choice Affirmative (writing an affirmative debate brief), (4) Forced Choice Negative (writing a negative debate brief). The control group received unrelated materials and wrote a speech. Comparing pretest and post-test results, the experimenter concluded that no speech activity was clearly superior to others in causing attitude change and that Black Studies materials were most successful in changing attitudes of the most highly prejudiced students. (Author/LG)

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Speech Teachers, Black Studies, and Racial Attitudes

Jerry Butler

Douglas Ehninger, during his tenure as president of the Speech Association of America, delivered a speech at the Association's National Convention in which he made specific suggestions for the future health and prosperity of the field of speech communication. His primary recommendation was that teachers of speech search out means and methods that can "facilitate understanding among men and between factions."[1]

Recent journal articles and convention programs indicate that Professor Ehninger's recommendations are being widely accepted.[2] The field of speech communication is matching the academic areas of music, history, and English in adding new materials and courses to the curricula which emphasize contributions of minority groups. It is time now to evaluate our activities to determine how these curriculum changes are affecting our students.

The purpose of this investigation was two-fold. The first is pedigogical, i.e., to assess the impact of including black materials into speech classes upon the attitudes of white students. The second goal was to test some aspects of cognitive dissonance theory.[3]

The cognitive dissonance theory of attitude change suggests that the speech classroom situation provides a unique situation to affect attitude change. As a theory, it suggested reasons for doing what was done in the treatment groups, suggested possibilities for the experimental design, supported a rationale for the hypotheses, and extended the areas into which the findings might be generalized. Exposure to information

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and various speech exercises using black materials was the independent variable, attitudes toward Negroes was the dependent variable.

Procedures

One hundred and eighty high school speech students enrolled in all white speech classes in four Illinois High Schools served as subjects in the study. All subjects were given the Westie's Summated Differences Scale (SDS)[4] and a California "F" Scale.[5] On the basis of the pretest SDS scores, each of the subjects was placed in one of the three different levels "Prejudiced," "Moderate," or "Favorable."[6] Persons in each of these levels were then randomly assigned to one of the four experimental groups and the control group. The basic structure of the research then, was a treatments X levels design with five treatments and three levels.

Each treatment group was similar in pre-experimental attitude but different in the activities they performed. Four of the treatments received a folder containing materials which are frequently suggested for high school history and English teachers who want to add ethnic materials to their courses.[7] The "exposure" group was told to read and study the materials in the folder. This was selected as a treatment activity because cognitive dissonance theory has indicated that exposure to counter attitudinal information can result in attitude change and because students enrolled in speech class frequently read and study in this manner when preparing speeches or selecting material for oral interpretation presentations.

The "forced compliance" group was required to use the folder of materials and work individually in preparing a speech of a persuasive nature that might be entitled "American Business and Industry should make Reparation Payments to the Black People of our Nation." The theoretical reason for doing this is that the cognitive dissonance construct indicates that making counter attitudinal statements creates dissonance which may result in a more positive evaluation of the position stated. The practical reason for using this assignment is, of course, because persuasive speaking is often a vital part of high school speech classes and occasionally topics are assigned to the students as in this treatment. After preparation, the speech was given on tape rather than to the class to avoid contamination of the other treatment groups.

The "forced choice affirmative" group used the folder of material in preparing a debate brief and affirmative constructive speech on the proposition: "Resolved: That the Federal Government should make Reparation Payments to Black Americans." The "forced choice negative" group was similar to the "forced choice affirmative" except that they debated negatively. The constructive speeches for groups four and five were recorded and not presented to an actual audience.

The fifth treatment was the control group which prepared speeches on an aspect of environmental pollution using a prepared packet of reproduced articles as resource material.

Immediately after completion of the assignments all treatments were given a post-test and three months later a delayed post-test.

Both post-experimental tests were readministerations fo the SDS and F Scale.

Analysis of variance techniques were used in analyzing data. The level of significance for appropriate t and F tests was set at .05. This level was selected because the consequences of making a type I error are consisered more serious than making a type II error.

Hypotheses

Dissonance theory suggested the following hypotheses:

I. There is a significant attitude change for each experimental group.

II. The degree of attitude change (as shown by difference between pretest and post-test scores) is significantly different across all treatments.

III. There is a significant difference between the amount of attitude change at all levels.

Results and Discussion

The data indicates Hypothesis I should be rejected as it applies to post-post-test scores. Table I shows that the difference between pretest and post-test scores were generally in the predicted direction, although the difference was statistically non-significant. This finding suggests that positive racial attitudes may be directed by these kinds of speech activities, but that these attitude changes are not significant across a short period of time.

Table I. Posting of t values for comparison of pre-test scores with both post-test and post-post-test scores of each treatment for both instruments.

		Control	Exposure	Forced Choice Affirmative	Forced Choice Negative	Forced Compliance
Post test minus Pre test	SDS	.608	1.21	1.83	.181	1.131
	F	.07	.035	.03	.059	.661
Post-post-test minus Pre test	SDS	1,725	2.995*	2.254*	1.241	3.391*
	F	.685	-.611	2.101*	-.82	1.449

* These t scores significant at .05 confidence level.

Across a longer period of time, however, the results of the study indicate that "black studies materials" can be used effectively in speech classes to promote more positive racial attitudes.

Theoretically, the findings indicated in Table I show that although dissonance theory can accurately predict the direction of the attitude change, it is less successful in predicting the degree of change.

Hypothesis II was rejected on the basis of the SDS scores. Because main effects with the Adorno scale scores could not be examined due to significant interaction, simple effects (looking at all treatments across each level) were examined, and each was found to be non-significant. Using the "Adorno" scale scores, it was improper to examine main effects because significant interaction was discovered between treatments and levels. This finding indicates that attitude change generated by the Forced Choice assignment was no greater or less than the attitude change generated by the Forced Choice

assignment, and so on with all experimental groups.

Hypothesis III could not be tested using Adorno scale scores due to the TXL interaction. The lack of interaction using SDS scores, however, did allow this hypothesis to be tested, and it was found to be significant. Acceptance of this hypothesis and inspection of treatments means indicates that the amount of attitude change for the highly prejuciced group was greater than that group was greater than that experienced by those of the moderate or unprejudiced group. This finding indicates that insertions of black materials into speech classes can be most successful in changing attitudes in classes where the students appear to be highly prejudiced. This finding supports cognitive dissonance theory postulations in both the direction and degree of attitude change.

Conclusion

This study has suggested some of the ways teachers of speech can incorporate black studies into their classes, and, in addition, has attempted to evaluate the potentcy of these techniques in developing positive racial attitudes. The techniques suggested by the application of principles of cognitive dissonance in the speech classroom situations have indicated that positive results can accrue. The research suggests the following conclusion: (1) That a variety of speech exercises including debate, persuasive speaking, and general research like reading, can create more positive racial attitudes over an extended period of time, (2) that no single such speech activity is clearly superior to others in creating such positive attitude change, and (3) that these speech activities are most successful in creating positive attitude change among persons who are considered to be highly prejudiced.

Footnotes

[1]Douglas Ehninger, " 'In Relevence, Relatedness, and Reorientation' Excerpts from the 1968 Presidential Address,"Spectra, V (February, 1969), 4.

[2]James E. Roever, Proceedings: Speech Association of America Summer Conference V. Theme: Research and Action (New York: Speech Association of America, 1969), and Richard Gregg, A. Jackson McCormack, and Douglas Penderson, "A Description of the Interaction Between Black Youth and White Teachers in a Ghetto Speech Class, The Speech Teacher, XIX (January 1970), 1-8. Today's Speech: Black Language Literature Rhetoric and Communication, Vol. 19, No. 2, Spring 1971.

[3]This theory was introduced by Leon Festinger in A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (Stanford, California, Stanford Univ. Press, 1956) but its particular interpretation and additions by Jack Brehm and Arthur Cohen in Explorations in Cognitive Dissonance (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1965) is a more complete expression of the theoretical bases for this study.

[4]A lengthy description of this scale and suggestions for users has been presented by its developer, Frank R. Westie, "A Technique for the Measurement of Race Attitudes, " American Sociological Review, IVIII (February, 1953) 73-78. The instrument is bases on responses to four social distance scales. The respondent is apt to think he is providing information about how he feels about certain levels of employment rather than how he feels about Negroes per se. Original test-retest reliability scores, using high school students as subjects was reported to be .94. Lawrence Wrightsman in an unpublished statement at Peabody College reported reliability at .804 in 1964. In terms of validity, DeFleur was able to predict behavior from the scores on the SDS in Marie Jaboda and Niel Warner, Attitudes (Baltomore, 1966).

[5]This scale was developed by Theodore W. Adorno and his associates and is reported upon in detail in T. W. Adorno, et al. The Authoritorian Personality. (New York, 1959). The developers tried to measure prejudice without appearing to have this name and without mentioning the name of any minority group. The original authors reported average reliability at .90 with a range of .81 to .97. The scale is one of the most heavily used in racial attitude research today according to Charles M. Bojean, Richard J. Hill, and S. Dale McLemore, Sociological Measurement, (San Francisco, 1967).

[6] A scattergram of these scores indicated that the scores approached a normal distribution, with the mean score indicating slightly prejudiced against Negroes. (The SDS provides a method od conceptionalizing a "0" prejudice level.) The normal dostribution also indicates that parametric techniques are acceptable.

[7] Included in the folder were reprints of the following: "The Discovery of What it Means to be an American, "An essay by James Baldwin; "I Have a Dream," a speech by Martin L. King; a selection of American Negro Poetry by Arona Bontemps; The American Negro: A Story Retold, a brief history of the Negro in America by Alberta Michael Lindsey; and a chapter from the autobiography, Narrative of the Life and Times of Frederick Douglas: An American Slave.